Freedom Watch™

Citizens Project

Two Christians Discuss Racial Reconciliation

The Reconciliation Movement is sweeping through many evangelical Christian churches and organizations. This movement began in the early 1990s with John Dawson's International Reconciliation Coalition which called for healing and reconciliation across racial, gender and religious lines. Its central doctrine is that racial hatred and inequality are incompatible with Christian love.

What follows is a discussion between two Christian members of the Citizens Project Board. Both have been involved in the civil rights movement for decades. Greg Walta is a white attorney. Jesse Brown is an African-American pastor of Payne Chapel AME Church.

The History of White Christianity and Race in America

Walta: When it comes to the issue of race in America, it is almost as if there are two Christian churches in the white community. One is the inclusive and universal church which recognizes that the love of Jesus requires us to love everyone regardless of their race. The other is a narrow and angry church which uses the Bible to exclude and dehumanize racial minorities.

Brown: No question about it. There have been white Christian heroes like the abolitionist Quakers, but most white churches have been timid at best and hostile at worst. Pastors of Southern white churches were often heads of the local KKK. The sad truth is that slavery and segregation could not have existed in this country without the support of most white Christians.

It is discouraging that some of the most vocal advocates of racial reconciliation oppose the very actions needed to bring about racial justice.

Hopeful Signs

Walta: I see hopeful signs among some of the most conservative Christians. The Southern Baptists repented for the active role their church played in slavery and segregation. Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition admitted the evangelical churches were on the wrong side of the civil rights movement. Billy Graham recently said racism is a great sin that Christians must actively oppose. Bill McCartney of Promise Keepers seems genuinely committed to reaching out to African-American men.

Brown: It's a big improvement over the days when the Bible was used to justify slavery, segregation and discrimination. But true repentance leads to action, and we've seen precious little action. Blacks are being hugged by whites at stadium revivals, but we need more than hugs.

Walta: Hugs beat hostility. White men hugging black men is a step in the right direction.

Brown: Yes, and we have a long way to go. For there to be reconciliation, there must be truth. Once we have truth, there must be courage to take action. Only then can we have real reconciliation.

Truth and Reconciliation

Walta: What truth needs to be understood for racial reconciliation to be a reality?

Brown: We must admit that racism is alive and well today. We must acknowledge the enormous economic, social, educational and emotional damage to minorities caused by white racism in America. Then we will understand that a few hugs are just a start. We will understand justice comes only when the white community makes massive efforts to wipe out the scars of past racism. These efforts must include affirmative action, strong civil rights enforcement, equal access to high quality and balanced education, equal access to banks and many other things. It will take tremendous courage for

Continued on page 2

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Our Hero

This is the first issue of *Freedom Watch* without Doug Triggs at its helm. As this is being written, he is on his way to Moab to bike. By publication, he will have returned from Moab, and started toward San Diego. After five years of hearing him mutter "I've gotta get a life!" and "Balance! Balance!", he has now freed himself. (We realize it isn't just his bicycle riding that his muttered "balance" refers to.) Simply put, Doug wants more time for his family and himself.

These past five years, Doug has been *Freedom Watch's* publisher, editor, and primary writer. Not only has he volunteered about 80 hours of his time each month since he started the paper, but he's done it with constancy and integrity of purpose. This has meant many rewrites of his and others' work, rereading each article a dozen times and editing for content, style and tone. Consistently, his writing is informative and his editing meticulous.

As co-founder of Citizens Project, he has been instrumental in establishing its tone, character, and philosophy.

Doug's dedication to *Freedom Watch* has always begun with tireless research. This has enabled him to recognize breaking stories and deliver insightful pieces which clearly explain the context and source of concern.

Freedom Watch was the first local periodical covering the extreme stances of groups such as Colorado for Family Values with a critical eye. Doug has consistently worked to present the conceptual, political and historical connections to his readers, identifying which groups or factions are pushing which agendas. There is no substitute for his many hours of research. He reads materials from across the political spectrum to understand that spectrum, and convey it to readers.

So now, after five years of nightly immersion in journals, magazines, newsletters, newspapers, and books, Doug wants to throw himself against some mountains. His mantra is "Bike, bike, hike, hike, climb, climb!" As responsible and diligent as he is, there's a wild man lurking inside (which we are happy to see take flight ... er, pedal). We hope his irrepressible enthusiasm works as well for him on a mountain trail as it has during each Freedom Watch production.

Growing up in rural South Dakota, Doug sang in the church choir, won math awards, and swam and boated on the Missouri River. After returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam, he worked at his family's car dealership with his father, with whom he continues to be quite close. From there, he went on to get a Master's Degree in international relations, then his law degree, and finally to set up practice as a bankruptcy attorney in Colorado Springs. Something in all that made him not only hard-working, but also easygoing, with a dry, sharp wit.

As co-founder of Citizens Project, he has been instrumental in establishing its tone, character, and philosophy. Doug isn't leaving the organization itself at all; nor, in fact, is he really leaving *Freedom Watch* – he's just moving to its back seat, to continue the journey but not to drive. It's reassuring to a lot of us that he'll continue to be a force in Citizens Project and its monthly publication. As Amy Divine says, "He's a windfall, and we love him."

Thank you, Doug, for having the courage to speak out and the integrity to maintain such high journalistic standards. *Freedom Watch* has been indispensable in understanding why and how our community has changed in the past five years. Thank you from all of us. **CP**

Racial Reconciliation, Continued

white Christian leaders to lead their flocks in this direction.

Walta: For all the hopeful signs, it is discouraging that some of the most vocal advocates of racial reconciliation oppose the very actions needed to bring about racial justice.

Brown: It is discouraging. It seems the most vocal opponents of affirmative action come from the evangelical Christian community. Most evangelical leaders also oppose government aid to the poor, strong civil rights enforcement, public education, fair banking laws, and other programs necessary to address centuries of discrimination. I understand conservative distrust of government. But without government, some of these problems will never be solved.

At the same time we preach forgiveness and self-improvement, we must confront white Christians on their obligation to make real efforts to counter racism and its effects.

Walta: I think some Christians also believe racism is a thing of the past.

Brown: We've made some progress, but America is more segregated today than it was twenty years ago. The gulf between rich and poor is the widest in American history. The ghettos are worse today than ever. Even when racism ceases to exist, we will suffer its consequences for a long time.

The Role of the Black Church

Walta: It looks like the white church has its work cut out for it. What is the role of the black church in racial reconciliation?

Brown: Most black preachers understand racism and violence have no place in Christianity. Following the model of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., many have been leaders in the fight for racial justice. The biggest job of the black church in racial reconciliation is to work on anger in our youth and to preach forgiveness. We must also push our young people to become well educated, but they become discouraged when the opportunities are not there. At the same time that we preach forgiveness and self-improvement, we must confront white Christians on their obligation to make real efforts to counter racism and its effects.

Colorado Springs

Walta: In general, how do you view racial reconciliation in Colorado Springs?

Brown: Until the late 40s, Colorado Springs had a tight system of racial segregation. Theaters, lunch counters, swimming pools and most public facilities were strictly segregated. Even today, we are behind the rest of the country. We have a lot of work to do.

Walta: For a while, tolerance was a bad word in this city. It's tough to achieve reconciliation in an atmosphere of intolerance.

Brown: We blacks learned a long time ago that once hatred is loose in a town, we will eventually be the target. It may start with Jews or homosexuals, but we're always high on the list. That's why we oppose hatred of all kinds. Hatred is contagious. So is love. If Christianity stands for anything, it stands for this.

Walta: Let's talk about today. As a lawyer, for example, I'm concerned about the justice system. *It's generating some* questionable decisions.

Brown: It sure is. In recent weeks we saw an African-American woman prosecuted for murder for protecting herself and her family from an aggressive white man trying to break into her home. On the other hand, we saw a young white man run over and kill an African-American honor student in a high school parking lot. He got a traffic ticket and a brief visit to jail. If true racial reconciliation is to happen, we must all speak out against this kind of injustice and against all injustice.

Walta: I tend to be a liberal. I favor affirmative action in employment, fair banking regulations and other forms of governmental action. But there is no set formula. We need to take strong and courageous action to accomplish racial reconciliation. The method doesn't matter much.

Brown: We'll be judged by our results. If we love each other like Christians are supposed to, we'll find all kinds of creative ways to help each other. If we hate each other, we'll find creative ways to destroy each other. It will take hard work by individuals, churches and government to build an America we can all be proud of. I'm an optimist, so let's get to work.

Walta: Amen. **CP**

Citizens Project

D11 Sexual Conduct Policy

by Piper Foster

The lingering issue of sexual standards, raised by Will Perkins and Colorado for Family Values, will soon be addressed by the District 11 School Board. Propelled by a postcard campaign and Board member Art Nutter's insistence, the District 11 School Board could discuss the proposal as early as mid-May.

At the *Lever* ... students feel increased pressure to avoid "touchy" subjects.

Since January, district administration has compiled each reference to abstinence in the school curriculum, in order to clarify current policy. The health curriculum currently in use was reviewed and approved by a K-12 Health Curriculum Review Committee comprised of parents, teachers and students over an 18 month period.

It appears the administration will recommend the Board make available a summation of current policy, rather than adopt any additional policy. Board and administration alike have expressed concern that a policy which addresses "traditional marriage" (as Perkins' does) would not reflect the reality of most students in the District.

At the *Lever*, Palmer High's student paper whose feature about gay teens sparked CFV's call for a new policy, students feel increased pressure to avoid "touchy" subjects. "The students haven't wanted to back down that much, but I definitely feel that the adults have been intimidated by the controversy," explains Courtney Martin, a junior and *Lever* Commentary Editor. A subtle self-censorship remains, despite the encouraging verdict by the School Board on student publications policy.

The anticipated Sexual Conduct Policy review could further influence the Lever's staff.

The Board is seeking input on a sexual conduct policy

Write to:
Board of Education
School District 11
1115 N. El Paso St.,
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
or fax to: 577-4546

Citizens Project

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Say "yes" to tolerance and civility in Colorado Springs.

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The Religious Freedom Amendment

End of rift on right may create greater rift nationally

Congress will be asked to consider another constitutional amendment regarding school prayer this year.

Ernest Istook (R-OK) will propose an amendment for the second year in a row. This year, however, some heavy hitters on the religious right have overcome a past schism in order to support it. Other religious groups, even some from the far right of the spectrum, continue to dissent.

The amendment is dubbed the "Religious Freedom Amendment, *To Protect Voluntary School Prayer and Religious Expression in Public.*" The entire text contains only 52 words:

To secure the people's right to acknowledge God: The right to pray or acknowledge religious belief, heritage or tradition on public property, including public schools, shall not be infringed. The government shall not compel joining in prayer, initiate or compose school prayers, discriminate against or deny a benefit on account of religion.

Despite its brevity, the amendment has the power to create substantial discord, even among sympathetic groups.

In the last two years, three separate amendments have competed for the support of the religious right, illustrating differing opinions within the community.

Equality, Liberty or Freedom

In 1995, Rep. Henry Hyde proposed the Religious Equality amendment which dealt primarily with governmental funding of religious activities. A week later, Istook introduced the Religious Liberties amendment which stressed school prayer and religious expression. In 1996, Rep. Dick Armey, with the support of House leadership, proposed the Religious Freedom Amendment combining aspects of the previous two amendments.

Major organizations took different sides. Backing Hyde, who was softer on school prayer, were Focus on the Family, the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (CLC), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and the Christian Legal Society. Others who favored stronger support for school prayer, including Concerned Women for America and the American Family Association, sided with Istook.

Meanwhile, the powerful Christian Coalition sat on the sidelines, saying it would support whichever version emerged as the leading proposal.

However, none of the proposals was acted upon.

In the past two years, three separate amendments have competed for the support of the religious right, illustrating differing opinions within the community.

End of Rift?

The latest Istook proposal seems to have unified, at least partially, previously opposing forces. This proposal received immediate backing from nine major groups, including two who formerly backed the Hyde amendment: the Family Research Council and Focus. The Christian Coalition, previously on the sidelines, announced it would contribute up to $2 million to lobby on behalf of the amendment.

In his announcement, Istook said: "Under the pretense of promoting tolerance, religious expression is being singled out for censorship. All other types of language, conduct, nudity and even sex acts are being given special protection, while religion and our values are being censored."

Current interpretation of the 1st Amendment allows students and teachers to practice their religious beliefs in school, individually or in extra curricular groups.

However, current interpretation of the First Amendment allows students and teachers to practice their religious beliefs in school, individually or in extra curricular groups. Limitations under current law apply only when an audience is held captive by governmental regulation, or governmental power or money is used to endorse any particular religion.

Preliminary legal analysis suggests Istook's amendment would turn all that around. Richard Land, executive director of the CLC says the Istook language "rips the Establishment Clause to shreds" by allowing public school teachers to proselytize in their classrooms, as long as they were not compelled by the school do so, nor compelled their students to participate.

The amendment states that the government may not *deny a benefit on account of religion.* This could open the floodgate for governmental funding of sectarian activities, including religious schools. As Steven McFarland of the Christian Legal Society told the *Washington Post*, the Salt Lake City council could use tax money to erect a statue of Brigham Young – while Seattle could erect a shrine to the Earth Goddess.

New Rift Among School Prayer Advocates?

Several conservative groups have come out in opposition to the proposal, including McFarland's Christian Legal Society, the CLC, and the NAE. They join dozens of moderate religious organizations who oppose altering the First Amendment, such as the Episcopal Church, the Anti-Defamation League, and the United Church of Christ.

Last year, concerns the amendment could cause great strife were raised to Istook. The violence between Catholics and Protestants over school prayer last century was mentioned. Istook responded: "It's ridiculous to suggest that people will turn to violence in the name of religion." **CP**

News Briefs

American Family Association Seeks To Ban Book

The American Family Association's new Colorado chapter has asked the Pikes Peak Library District to ban Howard Stern's 1995 book, *Miss America.* They claim the book "is verbal and visual pornography." The AFA, a right wing Christian organization based in Mississippi, is known for organizing boycotts of the media and corporations they believe promote immorality. They are responsible for organizing boycotts of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, pressuring Blockbuster Video to stop carrying movies rated NC-17 and supporting Operation Rescue protesters and landlords refusing to rent to unmarried couples.

Miss America joins *Little Red Riding Hood* as two of four books challenged so far this year in the Pikes Peak Library District.

"Ex-gay" Rally In Springs

The new Colorado chapter of The American Family Association also hosted Michael Johnston, a "former homosexual" living with AIDS, in a rally against homosexuality. Approximately 90 people attended the April 11 rally (including representatives from Citizens Project, Ground Zero and PFLAG). Only about 25 attended the Saturday workshops.

Johnston is connected to P-FOX, Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays. P-FOX was founded to counter PFLAG, a national group of supportive parents and friends of lesbians and gays. Johnston is also credited with founding National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day, planned to coincide with National Coming Out Day each year.

Shock Jock Replaced

KVOR, once the home of Chuck Baker's show, "On the Carpet," has replaced Chuck with former KKTV news anchor, Richard Randall. Baker, known for his support of militias and right -wing causes, is still on the air, however, at Hot Talk 1460 AM. KVOR's decision to replace Baker with a widely respected journalist comes as a welcome surprise.

Courtroom Commandments

A judge in Montgomery, Alabama has refused to remove a plaque with the Ten Commandments from his courtroom, despite an Alabama court ruling that it violates the Constitution by promoting one religion in a government setting. The judge, participating in a rally on the court steps, vowed to appeal the decision, stating "We must – nay, we will – have God back in America again." Alabama Governor Fob James joined the judge and Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed at the rally and threatened to call out the National Guard if anyone tries to remove the judge's plaque.

The judge invites others to pray with him in court, as long as they're not Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. As he explains, "We are not a nation founded upon the Hindu god or Buddha."

Christian Coalition Advocates Theocracy

Marring Ralph Reed's efforts to soften the Coalition's image, a recent Brevard County (FL) chapter newsletter advocated "a theocracy – a nation ruled by God and God's Laws." The author of the statement, an officer in the chapter, explains the proposed "Christian Republic" would require the majority of its citizens to adhere to a standard of Christian orthodoxy while tolerating minor theological and denominational differences.

The Bottom Line

A recent study by the Greater Colorado Springs Economic Development Corporation found that many people outside the city believe Colorado Springs is controlled by "religious zealots." The EDC sees this as a "significant detriment to recruiting talented people [who] fear the imposition on the general public of extreme beliefs through schools and through government." The bottom line: extremism undermines the economic well-being of our community.

See More News Briefs on next page

Citizens Project

Inside CP

CP In the News

The Gazette ran a piece by CP Board Member Richard Van Scotter on school choice. The *Denver Post* used the CP Candidate Survey for an article on local elections. CP was quoted in a *Tampa Tribune* story on Gideons International efforts to distribute Bibles in public schools. CP contributed to an article in the *Washington Blade* on Colorado for Family Values' proposed Sexual Conduct Policy. Megan Day spoke about CP at Montview Presbyterian Church in Denver, and at the Broadmoor Rotary Club.

The *Gazette* and KKTV featured the Candidate Forum co-sponsored by Citizens Project and 14 other organizations. Three hundred people packed Centennial Hall for the Forum. KKTV highlighted the CP Candidate Survey as a resource for voters. *Ground Zero News* included a feature on Citizens Project and reprinted the CP Survey. Richard Van Scotter and Megan were guests on KVOR to discuss vouchers.

Volunteers R Us

CP could not function without the tremendous efforts of our many volunteers. More help is always needed, however. Volunteers are currently needed to help with research, mailings, office work and more. Please call us if you can help: 520-9899.

Wish List:

We are in need of a VCR and blank cassette tapes.

Announcements

Nobel Laureate Visits Town

Food for Thought Gatherings will host Nobel Laureate, Holocaust survivor, and author Elie Wiesel. Wiesel's lecture on peace and atonement will be part of a Holocaust Commemoration hosted by Food For Thought to bring diverse people together and provoke dialogue and reflection. The Holocaust Commemoration will be held at Palmer High School, 301 N. Nevada, at 8 p.m. on May 7. Although tickets are required, the event is free. Call 634-0005 for information.

Breaking Bread

Food for Thought Gatherings will hold three introductory meetings for those interested in joining dinner discussions with a diverse group of people. Food for Thought brings together groups of 8-10 people from different racial, religious and political backgrounds for a series of dinners and thought-provoking discussions.

Introductory meetings will be held May 13th, 19th and 21st. All meetings will begin at 7 p.m. Call 634-0005 for more information.

More News Briefs

Civil Rights Nominee Under Attack

Governor Romer recently nominated former state senator and Republican, Bonnie Allison for the Civil Rights Commission. Colorado Springs state legislators Charlie Duke and Ray Powers were the most outspoken detractors of the recent Colorado Civil Rights Commission nominee, claiming she was too focused on the rights of women.

As a senator, Allison pushed legislation on behalf of fathers wrongfully denied visitation rights, and advocated for children and the developmentally disabled. Duke and his allies made a similar attack, on Rabbi Foster, last years Commission nominee, for his opposition to Amendment 2.

Parental Rights Revisited

In recent child welfare reform hearings, former Parental Rights Amendment advocates sought to relax laws against child abuse. Tom McMillen of the Rocky Mountain Family Council, an organization affiliated with Focus on the Family, proposed that the bill include "an affirmative statement" that corporal punishment was a reasonable exercise of parental discipline. He also asked that "reasonable" be defined as "resulting in only minor skin inflammation or redness."

Local State Rep. Doug Lamborn argued for an amendment banning immunity for those who report child abuse. Both Lamborn and McMillen were outspoken supporters of the Parental Rights Amendment and neither of their amendments were accepted.

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Human Relations Corner

The Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition will be involved in local Cinco de Mayo celebrations. Board members will staff a booth and seek opinions on human relations issues from festival-goers.

The HRC is seeking qualified and enthusiastic applicants for Board membership. For information call 447-0130 or write to the HRC at P.O. Box 554, Colorado Springs, CO 80901.

Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion and separation of church and state.

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